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ABSTRACT

This report is the sixth in a series of evaluations of the Queensland (Australia) Pre-School Correspondence Program (PSCP), a preschool program conducted by mail for families living in remote or isolated areas. This report represents teachers' perceptions and evaluations of the program. The introduction to the report outlines the administrative structure of the program and describes the teacher interview which provided the information for the study. The interviews were conducted individually and consisted of questions grouped under six general headings: (1) background information on the teacher, (2) the teacher's perception of the parent's role in the program, (3) the teacher's perception of her own role, (4) her evaluation of the type of information provided in the program, (5) her perception of the objectives of the program, and (6) her perception of the limits of the program. The report includes numerical summaries of responses to each question and a discussion of these results. The results are also discussed in relation to responses obtained from parents in a previous program evaluation. The final section of the report includes a summary of the major findings of the study and recommendations for utilizing the results to improve the program. (BD)

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No. 6 in a series on the evaluation
of the Queensland Pre-School Correspondence Program

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TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE PRE-SCHOOL CORRESPONDENCE PROGRAM

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ORGANIZATIONAL FRAMEWORK OF THE CORRESPONDENCE UNIT

Before discussing the distribution of characteristics of the teachers, the organizational framework within which they work will be outlined. The following diagram indicates the co-ordinator's perceptions of the overall structure of the Pre-School Correspondence Unit in 1977.

Figure I: Administrative Structure of Pre-School Correspondence Unit – 1977

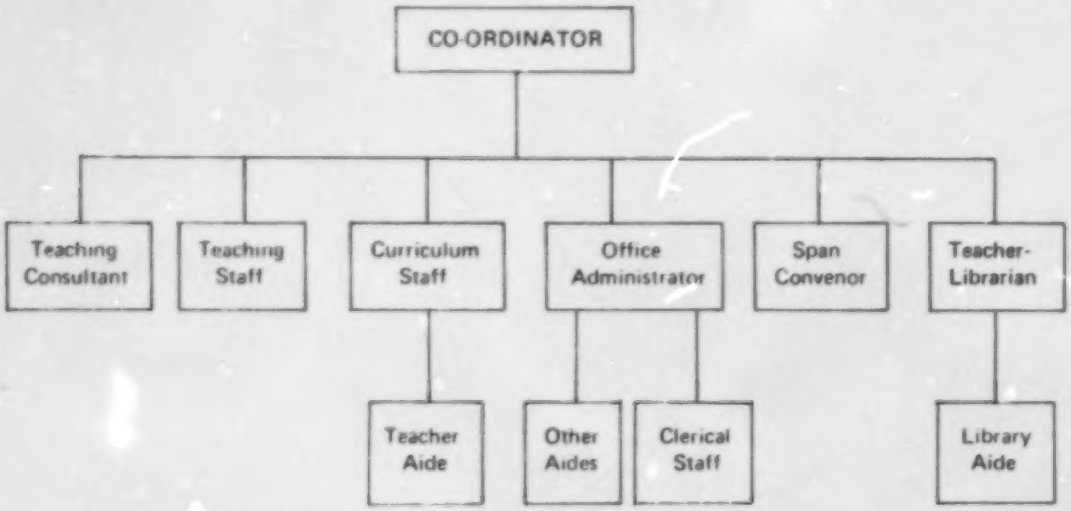
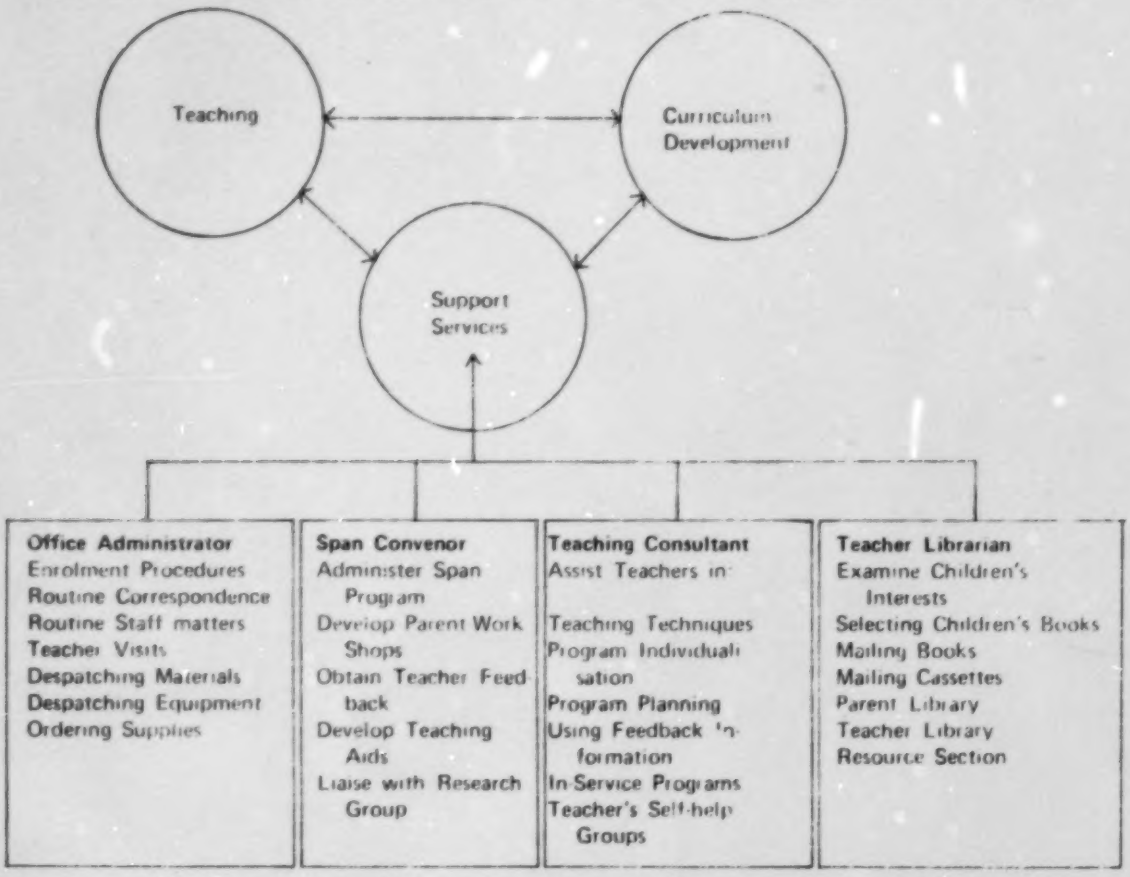


Figure No. I is a diagrammatic representation of the relationships between positions within the unit. The co-ordinator, as the senior officer within the unit, fulfils a leadership role. Her duties involve interaction and communication with individual teaching staff, clerical staff, as well as with groups in the organization. Other duties of the co-ordinator relate to the organizational needs of the unit and the projected development of the program.

Perusal of Figure I reveals the equality of authority between the six main divisions of the pre-school correspondence unit. Within this flat structure equal import has been assigned to the tasks of the teaching consultant, teaching staff, curriculum staff, office administrator, span convenor and the teacher-librarian. Details of the ongoing functions within the unit are displayed in Figure 2, in addition to their interrelationships with the major teaching and curriculum development functions of the unit.

Figure II: Relationships among Functions of Pre-School Correspondence Unit – 1977



The teaching and curriculum development functions are seen as all important in the correspondence unit and as interacting with each other. The role of teachers in a correspondence program is no easy task. Much of the planning, instructing, facilitating, and evaluating can only be effected through unique communication between the teacher and the parent by means of a continuous two-way flow of information. Parents are provided with a basic early childhood curriculum and teachers then have an intermediary role of communicating suggestions, instructions and reinforcement to children through parents.

As the basic curriculum content was not altered in 1977, the major curriculum functions have focussed on the development of accessory materials. Close liason with teachers was planned to ensure that developed materials would identify closely with feedback information given by parents. These materials were designed to be used by teachers and parents in extending children's concepts and skills.

These two important activities also interact with a number of support services available within the unit. These four main support services are delineated in Figure 2.

The duties of the office administrator, as outlined in the diagram, indicate the administrator's involvement in the organization of the day to day administrative procedures of the unit. This officer is also responsible for the activities of the clerical staff and teacher aides.

The Span convenor is responsible for the planning, administration, and co-ordination of the span program within the unit. Span playgroups provide the opportunity for parents and children from neighbouring areas to come together in a group socializing situation. The span convenor also liaises with an external research group and convenes teacher meetings throughout the year to obtain feedback information on operating span playgroups. In addition she is responsible for the development and use of teaching and professional resources.

The teaching consultant is present to assist teachers to develop particular teaching strategies and to help teachers focus on appropriate elements of the program and feedback information in order to program individually for children. Other duties of this person are to plan inservice programs throughout the year, initiate self-help teacher groups, and develop processes through which teachers learn to communicate one with the other.

The other main area of support services are those under the direction of the teacher-librarian. This teacher's responsibilities involve examining the family background information sheets to gain an initial idea of each child's likely interests, and to selectively choose books for each child. The resources under the direction of the teacher-librarian include the child's book/cassette library, parent library, teacher library, teacher record and cassette resource library, manipulative equipment/musical instruments, photographic slide and print library, and resource materials.

The preceding outline of the composition of the pre-school correspondence unit was included to furnish the reader with a knowledge base with which to relate teachers' comments on many aspects of the correspondence program and it's accompanying organizational framework. The body of this report represents the views of all teachers in the unit on parents' role and their own role in the program, as well as with regard to objectives, content and limits of the program and it's resultant effects.

A description of the organization is also contained in the report by Ashby, McGaw, Perry (1976), but due to the fact that this previous description was conceived in the interim period there are considerable differences.

INTRODUCTION

The majority of program materials forwarded to parents in the Pre-School Correspondence Program (P.S.C.P.) are set in nature and are dispatched routinely at fixed times. Teachers are responsible for responding to letters and cassette tapes sent in by parents and for providing supplementary materials, including books from the central library, which attempt to cater for the more individualized needs of the clients. In addition they are responsible for the modification and development of the set program materials as well as for the establishment of the teacher-parent and teacher-child relationships.

The perceptions of teachers about certain aspects of the program, their own role and that of parents are presented in this report.

Comparative data is available on parents' views of the program and of their interactions, by both letter and tape, with the teachers in McGaw, Ashby and Grant (1975). In addition to the above, a detailed analysis was conducted into the personal communications between parents and teachers, and children and teachers through all avenues of communication and is presented in McGaw, Ashby and Perry (1975).

Other reports available are outlined in the References Section. The difficulties associated with a correspondence program for pre-school children directly influence the teachers' potential to effectively individualize the teaching of their children.

However, in the case of pre-school aged children, generally aged 4–5 years, it is clear that the adult presenting the correspondence materials in the home has the direct teaching functions. In the main these adults are parents, generally mothers, who are not teacher trained, thus the professionally trained teacher undertakes an indirect teaching role, relating by letter and tape with both adult and child. Because of this there is considerable role strain involved.

The dimensions of this are not well documented in the literature. Further, although teachers in the P.S.C.P. visit the families they work with once a year, it is by no means certain that such visits can eliminate the sense of remoteness that the teacher feels.

TEACHER INTERVIEW

All teachers at the Pre-School Correspondence Unit who were involved in teaching a number of pre-school children were interviewed under the same conditions and for approximately the same time period. Due to the potential diversity of comments to the interview questions, most were of the open-ended variety. A completed interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. Thirty-one teachers at the Pre-School Correspondence Unit were involved in teaching functions and all received a personal interview by one of the projects two full-time research staff.

This in-depth interview was conducted at the end of the school year and all interviews took place at the premises of the Pre-School Correspondence Unit. An air of informality was maintained by having the interviewer move from one teachers desk to the next in order to conduct the personal interview. Interviewers endeavoured to elicit teachers opinions and attitudes and to emphasize that all answers recorded were completely confidential and annonymous.

The questions were selected so as to complement information gained from the interviews held with parents (McGaw, Ashby, Grant, 1975), and from the in-depth analysis of communication between teachers and parents and children (McGaw, Ashby, Perry, 1975). Questions were included if they supplemented the information already held about the characteristics of the teacher population.

The range of topics discussed is outlined in the summary of the teacher interview in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of Topics in Teacher Interview

Background Variables

1. Teacher's age
2. Number of children in family
3. Teacher training
4. Year qualification was obtained
5. Teaching experience
6. Other work experience
7. Length of rural residence
8. Reason for rural residence
9. Age at time of rural residence

View of Parents' Role

1. Description of parents role
2. Number of families in group
3. Ability of parents to carry out role
4. Number of parents unable to cope
5. Reason for parents difficulties
6. Advantage of being parent/teacher
7. Parents most important function

View of Own Role

1. Description of own role
2. Most important functions
3. Target efforts are directed to

Type of Information Provided In Program

1. Availability of information to parents
2. Judgement of teacher information sheet
3. Quality of information in letters and tapes

Objectives of the Program

1. Goals of the Program
2. Extent of achievement
3. Emphasis of Goals

Limits of the Program

1. Changes needed
2. Families not suited to program
3. Areas of dissatisfaction
4. Job satisfaction

The first section on teachers' background was filled in by teachers a few minutes prior to the major part of the interview and was designed to elicit information on teachers personal history covering topics such as their age, teaching experience and familiarity with rural residence. Other sections dealt more with their attitudes to aspects of the program's content goals, and questions about satisfaction and dissatisfaction of the role functions of both parents and teachers.

Thus, the teacher interview was designed to gather an accurate description of the teachers in the P.S.C.P. and their attitudes to parents' role and their own role in the program as well as certain aspects of the administrative procedures.

The interview was designed to provide indications of associations or correlations between relevant variables as well as descriptive data about teachers so as to explore the relationships between a number of variables such as, teachers' age and experience with their attitudes.

PROFILE OF TEACHING PERSONNEL

All pre-school correspondence teachers were females. This is however, understandable as all but a handful of pre-school teachers in State Pre-School centres are also female.

The age distribution of the 31 female teachers in the Pre-School Correspondence Unit is shown in Table 2. This group consists of all those who had a teaching load as part of their duties.

Table 2: Age Distribution of Teachers

Age Range	Number	Percent
Under 21	8	25.8
21 years to 25 years	11	35.5
26 years to 30 years	4	12.9
31 years to 35 years	3	9.7
36 years and over	5	16.1
TOTALS	31	100.0

Table 2 provides the numbers and percentages of teachers at four-yearly age intervals, the ages being taken at November, 1976. There is a heavy concentration of young teachers in the unit with nineteen teachers, 61.3 percent, under the age of twenty-five years. The predominance of young pre-school correspondence teachers is representative of pre-school teachers in State Pre-School Centres throughout Queensland. Because the provision of pre-school education was only introduced in 1973 the majority of all teachers in 1976 had less than 3 years teaching experience.

Of these teachers under 25 years of age, 18 of the 19 teachers, 94.8 percent, have a combined primary and pre-school diploma only. Half of the teachers over 25 yeras however had obtained another qualification.

It is noteworthy that during the course of interviews with parents enrolled in the Pre-School Correspondence Program, several made mention that teachers were unable to advise them accurately as they were too young and inexperienced, with no children of their own (McGaw, Ashby, Grant 1975). We shall discuss the basis for such a complaint in the light of the information gained as a result of interviewing teachers.

The distribution of the number of children teachers have in their own families is shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Number of Teacher's Children

Number of Children	Number	Percent
None	26	83.9
Two	1	3.2
Three	2	6.5
Four	1	3.2
Six	1	3.2
TOTALS	31	100.0

By far the greatest number of teachers, 26, have no children of their own, thus parents are justified in saying that most teachers, 83.9 percent, have had no first-hand experience in the role of a mother.

The distribution of the type of qualifications held by teachers was set out in Table 4.

Table 4: Range of Teachers' Qualifications

Type of Qualification	Number	Percent
Combined Primary and Pre-School Diploma	23	74.1
Primary Diploma and In-Service Pre-School	2	6.5
Kindergarten Diploma and Bachelor of Education	2	6.5
Kindergarten Diploma, Bachelor of Education and Music Diploma	1	3.2
Kindergarten Diploma, Physical Education Diploma and certificate of Sub-Normal	2	6.5
Kindergarten Diploma, Primary Diploma and In-Service Pre-School	1	3.2
TOTALS	31	100.0

The prevalent qualification held by 23, 74.1 percent of teachers was a combined primary and pre-school diploma. Table 5 revealed that of all teachers, 20, 64.6 percent, obtained their qualifications in the 1970's.

Table 5: Years in which Teachers Qualified

Years	Number	Percent
1940's only	1	3.2
1950's only	1	3.2
1960's only	3	9.7
1970's only	20	64.6
1940's and 1960's	1	3.2
1940's and 1970's	1	3.2
1950's and 1960's	1	3.2
1950's and 1970's	2	6.5
1960's and 1970's	1	3.2
TOTALS	31	100.0

This was in keeping with the introduction of State Pre-School Education in Queensland in 1973. Due to the age concentration of staff, the type of qualifications and years in which they were obtained are related as shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Type of Teaching Qualifications by Years Taken to Obtain Qualifications

Type of Qualifications	Years Taken to Obtain Qualifications					
	Obtained In Same Decade		Obtained Over Two Different Decades		Totals	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Pre-School and Primary	23	74.2	3	9.7	26	83.9
Pre-School/Primary/ Special Training/Degree	2	6.4	3	9.7	5	16.1
Totals	25	80.6	6	19.4	31	100.0

Most staff, 60 percent obtained a combined primary and pre-school diploma during the 1970's. Those holding combined qualifications tended also to have been those who obtained their second diploma or degree at least a decade after obtaining their initial qualification. This relationship was found more often than one would expect, thus indicating the relationship between these two variables. A relationship was also found between teachers' age and the type of qualifications they held.

Table 7: Teachers' Age by Type of Qualifications Held

Age of Teachers	Type of Qualifications Held: Combined Pre-School and Primary Only		Combined Primary/ Pre-School and Further Training		Totals	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Under 25	18	60.0	0	0	18	60.0
Over 25	6	20.0	6	20.0	12	40.0
Totals	24	80.0	6	20.0	30	100.0

Those over 25 years of age were found to have a significantly higher proportion of teachers with further qualifications than the group under 25 years of age.

Information dealing with the other suggestion made by parents that teachers seemed to be inexperienced (McGaw, Ashby, Grant, 1975), is displayed in Tables 8 and 9.

Table 8: Teachers' Age by Number of Years Teaching Pre-School Correspondence

Teachers' Age	Number of Years Teaching Pre-School Correspondence: One		Two–Three		Totals	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Under 25	18	58.1	1	3.2	19	61.3
Over 25	8	25.8	4	12.9	12	38.7
Totals	26	83.9	5	16.1	31	100.0

A relationship was found to exist between the variables of teachers' age and the length of time they had spent on the pre-school correspondence program. Teachers over the age of 25 years were more likely to have spent in excess of one year teaching the pre-school correspondence program than those teachers under 25 years.

As there was a high concentration of teachers in the younger age brackets the previous year, most under 25 year olds had terminated their service after one year.

There was a heavy concentration of teachers, 42 percent, who had had no prior pre-school teaching experience to the year they worked in 1976 at the Pre-School Correspondence Unit. Thus, the majority of teachers, 79.5 percent, had less than or only three years of teaching experience.

Table 9: Pre-School Teaching Experience

Years	Number	Percent
None	13	42.0
One	4	12.9
Two	3	9.7
Three	4	12.9
Four	1	3.2
Five	2	6.5
Six	1	3.2
Nine	1	3.2
Ten	1	3.2
Twelve	1	3.2
TOTALS	31	100.0

This was not supplemented in many cases by primary teaching experience as less than 17 percent, 5 teachers, had had any at all.

Table 10: Primary Teaching Experience

Years	Number	Percent
None	26	83.9
One	2	6.5
Three	1	3.2
Five	1	3.2
Six	1	3.2
TOTALS	31	100.0

In the group of 31 teachers, two only had had substantive training in special education. Each of these two teachers had ten years experience in areas such as the teaching of sub-normal children. In addition only ten, 32.3 percent, of the group of 31 teachers had any other work experience. The most frequently given "other occupation" was that of clerical and sales work.

Teachers' experience with rural living however was more widespread than their experience with teaching or the mothering role.

Table 11: Teacher's Residence in Rural Areas

Years	Number	Percent
None	13	41.9
Under five years	7	22.6
Five to ten years	4	12.9
Over ten years	7	22.6
TOTALS	31	100.0

Over half the teachers, 58.1 percent, had resided in a rural area for varying lengths of time and of these, eight were residents due to their occupations while the remainder had their family home in a rural area. Table 12 itemizes the reasons for teachers past residence in rural areas.

Table 12: Purpose of Residence in Rural Areas

Reasons	Number	Percent
Family home	10	55.6
Work place	5	27.8
Family home and work place	3	16.6
TOTALS	18	100.0

Thus it has been shown that many of the teachers involved with families on the program lack experience in both teaching and the mothering role as well as being of a young age group. On the basis of teachers comments it would seem advisable that where possible pre-school teachers with some years of experience in handling children and their problems be recruited to the correspondence unit. Most teachers would then be able to draw upon their past experiences when attempting to advise parents on problems, and older more mature teachers would be less threatened than younger inexperienced persons by the role strain which results when teaching by correspondence.

It would also help if teachers who have some knowledge of rural living and its accompanying limits and benefits were chosen to work in correspondence pre-school.

Those teachers who had lived in rural areas voiced the opinion that they felt quite at ease with parents, having a common knowledge of rural life to share. These teachers had favourable reactions from parents because parents felt that they empathized with them. Many teachers who had never lived in an isolated area voiced the opinion that they needed more personal visits to establish rapport with parents.

The problem of the young pre-school teacher relating to parents is a common one which does not present any simple solution. Teachers recently graduated from pre-service training are most frequently young with no children of their own, although they may be married. In the regular pre-school centre the problem is partially overcome because of natural confidence established on the basis of regular, personal and direct contact between teacher and parents. In a correspondence program the situation is much more difficult because of the indirect contact. In fact one consequence that followed from the 1975 study (McGaw, Ashby and Grant 1975) was the decision to enable each teacher to visit the families included in her group.

TEACHERS' VIEW OF PARENTS ROLE IN THE PROGRAM

In the personal interview with teachers several questions were asked to assess teachers' view of the role and functions of parents in the Pre-School Correspondence Program. Teachers were asked to describe the role parents played. The results are shown in Table 13.

Table 13: Teachers' Judgement of Parents Role

Type of Role	Number	Percent
Parent seen as teacher	20	64.5
Parent seen as Teacher's Aide	6	19.4
Liason between teacher and child - interpreting and supervising	5	16.1
TOTALS	31	100.0

Most teachers regarded parents as having a role in the Pre-School Correspondence Program equivalent to that of 'teacher' of their child.

Although 64.5 percent of teachers judged parents to have a teaching role in the program they also declared that a proportion of parents could not cope with this role in the pre-school program. Each teacher was asked to estimate the number of parents in their group who they believed definitely could not cope with the program. Out of a total of 747 parents, 106, 14.2 percent were judged by teachers as not being able to cope.

The reasons why parents were believed not able to cope are set out in Table 14.

Table 14: Reasons Why Parents Cannot Cope

Reasons	Number	Percent
Other commitments – children, work, problems	11	40.8
Language difficulty	2	7.4
Lack of education	5	18.5
Lazy, uninterested	3	11.1
Combination – commitments and language	2	7.4
Combination – commitments and lack of education	4	14.8
TOTALS	27	100.0

A group of 11 teachers, 40.8 percent, said the main reason was that parents had too many commitments to enable them to play their role in the program effectively. Parents had a combination of other commitments such as other children and their work commitments on the family property. One soluable problem was the inability of some enrolled migrant families to read the literature. All pre-school correspondence materials are presently only available in English.

Most teachers agreed that there were advantages to be had in being both parent and teacher to a child. Though most mentioned decided advantages, some foresaw problems, as can be seen in Table 15.

Table 15: Advantages of Parent being Teacher

Reasons	Number	Percent
Disadvantage - child disobeys	2	6.5
Parent knows child interests and level of development	11	35.4
Parent has unrestricted time, for individual attention	2	6.5
Parent can utilize home environment and routines	1	3.2
Combination - knows child and can use home environment	3	9.7
Combination – knows child and unrestricted time	4	12.9
Combination – disadvantage and knows child better	6	19.4
Combination – has unrestricted time and casula home environment	1	3.2
Combination – knows child, unrestricted time, can use home environment	1	3.2
TOTALS	31	100.0

The advantage most frequently mentioned by 25 of the 31 teachers was that the parent best knows their child's interests, capabilities and temperament. This was of immense use in planning work for the children.

Many parents also had a relatively free time schedule which enable them to fit in activities with their child at varying times throughout the day and night. Thus many were freer than teachers with respect to the time available for teaching their children as well as the amount of individual attention which could be afforded to their pre-school child. Although the pre-school child often had other siblings joining in or disrupting activities he usually had far less competition for the attention of his parent-teacher than children would for a teacher in a pre-school centre.

Parents at home also had a unique opportunity to use naturally occurring learning situations to present program topics to their children in new and interesting ways. In general this approach to learning is consistent with the mainstream of opinion in pre-school education in Australia.

Teachers' judgements of parents' most important function in the program are presented in Table 16.

Table 16: Teachers' Judgement of Parents most Important Function

Functions	Number	Percent
Interpret PSCP and apply to selves	8	25.8
Give feedback to Pre-School Correspondence Teacher	5	16.1
Interpret PSCP and give feedback to teacher	12	38.7
Ensure child enjoys learning, sharing education	6	19.4
TOTALS	31	100.0

Twelve teachers believed that the parent's most important function was to interpret the Pre-School Correspondence Program for their own use and to give feedback to the teacher on the consequent reactions of children to the activities. A small group of 6 teachers placed their emphasis on parents having gained enjoyment from sharing the learning experiences with their child. This comment was based on the observation of a number of parents who found they had a closer relationship with their children as a result of having joined in activities which were provided by the Pre-School Correspondence Program. (McGaw, Ashby, Grant, 1975).

There was a relationship between teacher's age and their view of parent's most important function as can be seen in Table 17.

Table 17: Teachers' Age by Their View of Parents Most Important Function

Teachers' Age	View of Parents' Most Important Function: Interpret Program and/or Give Teacher Feedback		Share Happy Learning Environment with Child		Totals	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Under 25 years	18	58.1	1	3.2	19	61.3
Over 25 years	7	22.6	5	16.1	12	38.7
Totals	25	80.6	6	19.4	31	100.0

It was found that teachers over 25 years of age placed the emphasis on parents sharing a happy learning environment with their children, while those teachers younger than 25 years were more likely to concentrate on the importance of parents interpreting the program and sending teachers feedback.

TEACHERS' VIEW OF THEIR OWN ROLE IN THE PROGRAM

The number of children a particular teacher had assigned to her group varied according to her other duties within the unit. (Refer to Figure 2). Teachers who had other time consuming duties such as administration of enrolments and clerical staff or the revision and supervision of reprinting the program materials had their teaching reduced to approximately ten children.

The most usual number of children assigned to a teacher was 26, 27 or 28, with a range of between 9 and 31. Details can be seen in Table 18.

Table 18: Distribution of Teaching Load in November, 1976

Number of Children	Number	Percent
9	1	3.2
10	2	6.5
20	1	3.2
22	2	6.5
23	2	6.5
24	1	3.2
25	3	9.6
26	6	19.4
27	5	16.1
28	6	19.4
29	1	3.2
31	1	3.2
TOTAL 757	31	100.0

When teachers were asked to identify their role in the Pre-School Correspondence Program the majority, 67.7 percent, believed their most important role was as a support, resource person and advisor to parents. Their responses can be seen in Table 19.

Table 19: View of Teachers Role in Program: 1st Mentioned

Role	Number	Percent
Child's Teacher	6	19.4
Parent resource, support, adviser	21	67.7
Programme development	3	9.7
Administrator	1	3.2
TOTALS	31	100.0

Teachers' comments were in line with their judgement of the parents' role in the program. Most judged parents to have a teaching role in the program and accordingly assigned themselves the role of advisors and friends to support parents. A group of 15 teachers mentioned a second role they had as a teacher in the program. The most frequently mentioned secondary role was that of child's teacher. This was the view of seven teachers, 22.6 percent.

The main tasks teachers associated with carrying out their role are included in Table 20.

Table 20: Most Important Teaching Function: 1st Mentioned

Functions	Number	Percent
Communicate with parents and children	10	32.2
Individualizing PSCP for family	14	45.2
Contribute to materials development	3	9.7
Administration of P.S.C.P.	1	3.2
Recognize and help with problems	3	9.7
TOTALS	31	100.0

Fourteen teachers said that planning and selecting individualized materials for each family was their foremost teaching function. Another ten emphasized the importance of personal communication with parents and children to strengthen the relationship between teacher and family. The emphasis was clearly on maintaining communication with parents and supplying suited individual resource materials to aid them in their parent-teaching role. Table 21 reveals the relationship between teachers' view of their important teaching functions and the number of years teachers taught in a pre-school centre.

Table 21: Number of Years Teaching Pre-School by View of Most Important Teaching Function

Years Teaching Pre-School	Most Important Teaching Functions: Communicate With Families – Letters and Tapes		Individualize Program. Interpret and Explain		Totals	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Under One	8	34.8	4	17.4	12	53.2
Over One	2	8.7	9	39.1	11	47.8
Totals	10	42.5	13	56.5	23	100.0

Teachers with less than one year's experience teaching in a pre-school centre emphasized the need for teachers to communicate with families by way of letters and tapes. However, a significantly larger percentage of teachers who had more experience teaching children in a centre prior to joining the P.S.C.P. said their most important function was to individualize the program by interpreting and explaining the program to families.

Teachers assigned great important to the parents' role in the program, but the program itself was designed to benefit the pre-school child. Teachers were asked to decide who was the primary target of their functions – their responses are shown in Table 22.

Table 22: Primary Target of Teachers

Target	Number	Percent
Parent	12	38.7
Child	4	12.9
Parent and Child	14	45.2
Teachers and Staff	1	3.2
TOTALS	31	100.0

The largest group of 14 teachers, 45.2 percent, were unwilling to choose between parent and child and focused their attention on the parent-child unit. A further 38.7 percent chose the parent as primary target of their communications. Several of these teachers mentioned that they aimed to contact the child through the parent. This would explain their choice of parent as primary target of their efforts. The necessity for administrative duties to be kept separate from teaching duties is reinforced by the comment by the teacher who dealt with administrative aspects of the unit. The teacher in question designated as her target, the teachers and clerical staff. It has been decided that this position will not carry teaching responsibilities in future years.

ASSESSMENT OF THE TYPE AND QUALITY OF INFORMATION PROVIDED FOR PARENTS

Teachers were asked what importance they attached to various types of information provided to parents in the Pre-School Correspondence Program. They were also asked whether or not they considered each type of information was presently being provided in the program. The responses are stated in Table 23.

Table 23: Type of Information Provided in Program

Type of Information to Parents	Is Important Is Provided		Is Important Not Provided		Not Important Is Provided		Not Important Not Provided		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
a. On specific aspects of child development	24	77.4	5	16.1	2	6.5	0	0	31	100.0
b. On why a particular activity is suggested	18	58.1	12	38.7	0	0	1	3.2	31	100.0
c. How to extend activities if children become particularly interested	22	71.0	7	22.6	1	3.2	1	3.2	31	100.0
d. Ideas on how to construct home made equipment	23	74.2	8	25.8	0	0	0	0	31	100.0
e. When requested, cognitive material in line with child's individual interest	21	67.7	10	32.3	0	0	0	0	31	100.0
f. Interpreting a Pre-School programme structured by others	14	45.2	16	51.6	1	3.2	0	0	31	100.0
g. How to utilize home environment to teach child basic skills	27	87.1	4	12.9	0	0	0	0	31	100.0

The core program offered to families is standard and teachers work together in close proximity with frequent opportunities for discussion of the program content. Given the above it is difficult to account for the substantial divergence of opinion between teachers as to what is provided in the core program. Despite allowances for individual perceptions which may account for some differences between teachers with regard to the importance of providing different types of information, when considering the results it is difficult to accept that teachers of the same program would disagree as to its set content. Further comment in relation to this area is made in the recommendation section of this report.

For most topics a substantial percentage of teachers considered that information was already being provided. However, this did not exclude teachers from making the comment that parents would benefit from receiving more information on the topics in Table 23. In some cases parents conveyed their lack of understanding on a particular topic after teachers had thought the same topic had been dealt with. Parents themselves had previously requested information on new topics and also asked for greater depth of information on topics (McGaw, Ashby, Grant, 1975). Although 77.4 percent of teachers believed information was given on the area of child development, several teachers and parents (McGaw, Ashby, Grant, 1975) indicated that more should be given to clarify aspects for parents. Comments included suggestions such as the possible provision of picture sets on the topic of child development.

Teachers disagreed as to whether information was provided on the reasons for which activities were set in the program. Of the 31 teachers, 18 said information was provided while 13 said it was not. All except one person considered it was important to provide parents with the rationale for activities and that reasons should be more consistently given.

With respect to whether information was being provided to parents on how to extend activities 75 percent said yes, however, 25 percent of teachers disagreed with this position. Similar results were found in response to the giving of information on making equipment at home with several teachers calling for more to be done in this area while others said it was presently well-covered. However all teachers considered this would be important to parents.

All teachers believed children should receive information in line with their own particular interests 32.3 percent did not believe this need was presently being met.

Teachers conflicted when asked whether parents were told how to interpret the pre-school correspondence program. Of the 30 who decided it was important to do so, 14 said it was presently included in the program while 16 disagreed. With results such as this it would seem that no matter what has been done in this area it has not been sufficient to clarify the area for parents or teachers. Renewed efforts must attempt to get the information across to the parent in an understandable form. These results have highlighted the need for these aspects to be covered within the scope of teachers induction course early in the year.

Information on how to use the home environment was important and provided in the view of 87.1 percent of teachers. There was a general concensus however that parents would benefit from more information on topics such as those covered in the interview schedule. (Appendix 1)

TEACHERS' COMMENTS ON PARENT-TEACHER COMMUNICATION

In a correspondence educational program the quality and type of commnication between parties were all important. Aside from the set questionnaire called the Teacher Information Sheet, other mediums were the personal letters and tapes sent between teachers and families. In previous reports we have commented on parents' judgements of these methods of communication (McGaw, Ashby, Grant, 1975). The Teacher Information Sheets consisted of a series of questions about the child's reaction to the discussion topics and activities suggested in the segments.

Parents were asked about their views on the value of the information they provided to the teachers through the Information Sheets. It was found that 54.6 percent of parents saw values in having the Teacher Information Sheets but only 36.3 percent believed that all the questions asked were necessary. There was a deal of dissatisfaction among parents with the content and the need to fill in the questionnaire (McGaw, Ashby, Grant, 1975).

Teachers' views about the usefulness of the Teacher Information Sheet are included in Table 24.

Table 24: Usefulness of Teacher Information Sheet

Usefulness	Number	Percent
Useful to great extent	3	9.7
Useful to moderate extent	22	70.9
Useful to slight extent	6	19.4
TOTALS	31	100.0

Most teachers, 70.9 percent, only found the questionnaire to be of moderate use to them. Teachers were asked to comment on the present form of the questionnaire to point out the areas in which it could be improved. Their comments are set out in Table 25.

Table 25: Comment on Teacher Information Sheet

Comment	Number	Percent
Must be reconstructed – not at all good, confusing	9	29.0
Areas neglected, needs detail on other areas	14	45.2
Parents resent it, feel threatened	6	19.4
Needs to be accompanied by summary of segment	1	3.2
Gives picture of what child does	1	3.2
TOTALS	31	100.0

All except one teacher believed it should be changed in some way. The largest group of 14 teachers, 45.2 percent, said that it neglected to ask about details in some areas, while others commented on the effect it had had on parents who found the questionnaire threatening by nature and confusing to complete. The overall opinion of teachers was that it urgently needed to be completely reviewed and reconstructed so that it only asked for information that would actually be used by teachers and was constructed so that it was simple to fill in.

Comments on the usefulness of personal letters and tapes which are sent between teachers and parents were more favourable.

Table 26: Usefulness of Parents' Comments in Letters and Tapes

Usefulness	Number	Percent
Useful to great extent	18	58.1
Useful to moderate extent	12	38.7
Useful to slight extent	1	3.2
TOTALS	31	100.0

The information included in such communications was judged to be helpful to a great extent by 58.1 percent of teachers. Table 27 shows their comments on the quality of information sent.

Table 27: Comment on Parents' Letters and Tapes

Comment	Number	Percent
Excellent – always useful	13	41.9
Depends on parent – use a lot	9	29.0
More useful than T.I.S. – say why don't use T.I.S.	7	22.6
More useful after personal visit	2	6.5
TOTALS	31	100.0

Thirteen teachers, 41.9 percent, found the information to have been consistently helpful, with a further 22.6 percent, who chose to comment that it was always more useful than the Teacher Information Sheets. Since teachers were gaining more useful information from parents by way of personal letters and tapes it would seem wise if parents were advised as to the type of information which would be useful to send to teachers.

Teachers were asked to judge the importance of providing such information to parents as well as to comment on whether such guidelines were already being given to parents through the pre-school correspondence program. Their answers are shown in Table 28.

Table 28: Importance of Giving Information on How to Give Feedback to Teachers

Importance	Number	Percent
Is important/is provided	5	16.1
Is important/not provided	25	80.7
Not important/is provided	1	3.2
TOTALS	31	100.0

A clear majority of 80.7 percent considered that it was important to give parents such information but said it was not being provided. When asked to comment further on the need to provide such information 84.0 percent of teachers said that more should be done to clarify for parents what information would be relevant to send teachers. No doubt some teachers have taken it upon themselves to convey to parents what type of information would be useful to them but teachers felt that it would be advisable if this were a topic dealt with more in the beginning of the program. The details of this could perhaps be given to teachers at the induction program early in the year.

OBJECTIVES OF THE PRE-SCHOOL CORRESPONDENCE PROGRAM

Teachers were asked their perceptions of the goals of the Pre-School Correspondence Program and the extent to which they believed these were being achieved. Before presenting the results it will be useful to briefly outline the aims and basis of the program. This statement is itself based upon a much more comprehensive document which defines the system-wide functions of pre-school education facilities in Queensland. (Qld. Department of Education, 1975.)

The philosophy of pre-school education in Queensland places main emphasis on the development and progress of the individual child within the context of the home and community environment. Broadly speaking the pre-school is seen as serving four major functions:

- To provide a bridge by which the young child can be assisted to make a smooth transition from home to school.
- To encourage parent interest and participation in the education process.
- To promote the physical and mental health of the young child.
- To develop those abilities, skills and attitudes which will aid educational progress.

These four functions are met by various facilities and programs in different settings in unique ways. The Pre-School Correspondence Program was designed to fulfil each of the four functions with respect of those children, and their families, who live in remote and isolated parts of Queensland. The fact that the program is home based and substantially parent-taught highlights a special characteristic. Further the fact that most of the children either continue at least part of their primary education by correspondence or enter a small one teacher school adds a further dimension.

Given the broad educational functions of the pre-school system in Queensland as a whole coupled with the particular features involved in a correspondence-type of provision certain further statements can be made. First, specifically aimed at providing resources to assist parents to contribute to the optimum educational development of their children. Second, the program was designed to promote continuity in the individual child's overall development. Third, the program sought to explore ways of providing for peer group socialization through the development of SPAN groups. (Ashby, Rosser and Boorsboom, 1976.)

Drawing these various facets together the following statement summarizes the range of considerations taken into account in developing the materials, resources and procedures that constitute the program.

1. The development of a theoretical base and curriculum goals should evolve from the specific needs of children with particular consideration begin given to:
   - geographical isolation and environmental conditions
   - family background factors
   - variability of socio-economic status
   - ethnic or cultural factors
   - special needs (physical or pathological) of individual children

2. The theoretical base should account for the cognitive, affective, psycho-motor and social growth and development of the child based on behavioural objectives.

3. Curriculum content based on the child's individual level of development to include learning experiences directed towards:
   - language arts and literature and associated skills
   - concepts in mathematics
   - social and physical sciences
   - motor skill development
   - in cognative thinking and active expression through music, movement and various art media.

   Basic to this, however, is the requirement that learning should desirably proceed on the basis of the child's direct involvement with relevant materials and interaction on a one-to-one basis with the parent (or home supervisor.)

4. That the role of the teacher should be seen as both 'active' and 'supportive', one in which the teacher initiates action through suggestion, instruction and re-inforcement, while at the same time supporting the parent in the task of facilitating and interacting with the child.

5. That feedback of information to the teacher by parents is seen as an effective means of assisting teachers in programming on an individual basis for children, thereby indicating accents for further program development and modification. Also that various procedures should be implemented by means of which a direct form of feedback can flow between the child and the teacher.

6. That by the use of media (personal as well as custom produced cassette tapes, audio visual materials and occasional School of the Air Services), regular communication can be made between teachers, children and parents in furthering the education process – an essential factor in the implementation of a home-based early childhood program.

7. The organization of teacher field visits to various centralized areas throughout the state should provide opportunity for teachers to meet with individual children and parents and to support the work of socializing Span Playgroups. Such visits to take place on an annual or more frequent basis.

8. An 'effective parenting' program be inbuilt as part of the learning process in order to assist parents in strengthening their capacity for facilitating the general growth and development of their own child.

9. That the major thrust of evaluation in the Correspondence Program should be formative in nature, being largely concerned with the compilation of a data base on each child, mainly through judicious unique questioning in the personal correspondence between teacher and parent. This form of evaluation is essential if the teacher is to be able to interact in a meaningful way with the parent in a teaching capacity.

10. That the establishment of ancillary services should support the learning/teaching process, essential in the development of a correspondence style early education program.

    Such services to include:
    - Children's Lending Library
    - Parent Lending Library
    - Teacher Reference Library
    - Audio/Visual Materials
    - Equipment Kits (basic functional materials)
    - Toy Lending Library for individual children and Span Playgroups.

    It should be noted that this topic is further referred to in Ashby, McGaw, Perry (1975) and Ashby, Cassin, Clemesha, Grant (1977).

During the course of the interview all teachers were asked what they believed were the goals of the Pre-School Correspondence Program. Their responses are presented in Table 29.

Table 29: Goals of Pre-School Correspondence Program: 1st Mentioned

Goals	Number	Percent
Provide Pre School Education for the isolated child	8	25.8
Prepare child for Grade 1	3	9.7
Develop childs abilities - cognitive, socio-emotional, physical	13	41.9
Provide parent education, support and advice	5	16.1
Facilitate Good Parent - Teacher - Child relations	2	6.5
TOTALS	31	100.0

The largest group of 13 teachers, 41.9 percent, considered that the goal of the program was to develop each child's abilities in the cognitive, socio-emotional and physical areas. This was similar in nature to the goal of providing pre-school education for the isolated child and the goal of preparing the child for Grade 1, as mentioned by eight and three teachers respectively. Thus, a total of 24 teachers, 77.4 percent, mentioned a goal which focussed on development of the child's abilities. Twenty-five teachers mentioned more than one important goal of the program. In addition, there is a relationship between the first and second mentioned goals.

Table 30: First Goal of Program that Teachers Mentioned by Second Goal Mentioned

		Second Goal				
		Develop Child's Abilities		Give Parents Supportive Information		Totals
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number / Percent
First Goal	Develop child's abilities	0	0	6	60.0	6 / 60.0
	Give parents supportive information	4	40.0	0	0	4 / 40.0
	Totals	4	40.0	6	60.0	10 / 100.0

It was revealed that 14 of those 18 teachers who mentioned a child-centred goal first, gave a parent-centred goal second. Most of those teachers who initially mentioned the goal as being to provide parents with supportive information said that developing the child was their second goal. The majority of teachers, 58.1 percent, believed that the emphasis of the program's goals was to advise parents on how to utilize the home as a learning environment for the child. Whereas the goal was to educate the child and develop her abilities to their potential, the emphasis in the program was on parents as it was through them that teachers could communicate with the children.

Other responses are set out in Table 31.

Table 31: Emphasis of Goals

Emphasis	Number	Percent
Develop childs cognitive skills	6	19.3
Develop child socio-emotionally	4	12.9
Parent education on home learning environment	18	58.1
Help parents and children enjoy learning together	3	9.7
TOTALS	31	100.0

A further 10 teachers, 32.2 percent, also mentioned the development of the child's skills as the emphasis of their goals.

Of the 24 teachers who said the goal was to provide the child with education and develop the child's abilities, 11 viewed the emphasis in the program as the provision of information and support to parents. Table 32 indicates that 45.8 percent of these 24 teachers espoused child-centred goals but perceived the emphasis necessary to accomplish same as focussing on the parent as mediator between teacher and child.

Table 32: Teachers' Views of the Program Goals by Perceived Emphasis of Goals

Teachers' Views of the Program Goals	Perceived Emphasis of Goals: Develop Child's Skills and Learning		Give Parents Confidence		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Provide child with education and develop abilities	13	41.9	11	35.5	24	77.4
Give Parents supportive information and relationship	0	0	7	22.6	7	26.6
Totals	13	41.9	18	58.1	31	100.0

A very important aspect of this area is the extent to which teachers deemed the above goals to have been successful. Teachers were interviewed near the end of the school year so that they were in a position to judge whether the goals had been achieved or not. Table 33 lists teachers' responses.

Table 33: Achievement of Goals

Extent of Achievement	Number	Percent
Not very well	1	3.2
Some but not others	8	25.8
To a moderate extent	14	45.2
To a great extent	8	25.8
TOTALS	31	100.0

The response made by 45.2 percent of teachers was that goals had been achieved to a moderate extent. Two groups of 8 teachers had achieved their goals to a great extent and a slight extent respectively. Some of the reasons for teachers having had only achieved moderate success with the program's goals are to be examined in the following section on the limits of the program in its present form.

LIMITS OF THE PROGRAM

Several teachers made suggestions for changes to the program which they believed would enable the program goals to be better achieved. They are presented in Table 34.

Table 34: Teachers' Suggestions for Changes to Pre-School Correspondence Program

Suggestion	Number	Percent
Have more regular contact early visits and communication	9	56.4
Use simpler language for parents	3	18.8
Limit group size to 25 children	1	6.2
Concentrate more on language, physical development	1	6.2
Change goals to suit parents	1	6.2
Give more parent education – whys of Pre-School Correspondence Program	1	6.2
TOTALS	16	100.0

Of the 16 teachers to make such recommendations 9, 56.4 percent, emphasized the need for more regular contact by way of visits and the early establishment of regular communication by way of personal letters and tapes. A further five felt that the program needed to be modified more for the parents. Several said that some parents found the language used too complex and that parents were not given the rationale for what they were asked to do in the program. Parents themselves had been vocal in their desire for explanation of the whys of the program topics and activities. (McGaw, Ashby, Grant 1975.)

Teachers who had perceived a good level of achievement of their program goals were less likely to advocate changes to the program than those who had had a lower level of achievement of goals.

It could not be expected that the program would be acceptable to all families who originally enrolled. In addition to the questions asked of teachers about the number of parents who definitely could not cope with the program, which has been dealt with in a previous section, teachers were asked if they believed any families were not suited by the pre-school correspondence program. Their responses are included in Table 35.

Table 35: Families not Suited by Pre-School Correspondence Program

Type of Family	Number	Percent
Migrants – language problems	2	9.1
Parents with low education find language too complex	11	50.1
Parents short of time	2	9.1
Children who already attend a Centre	1	4.5
Specials eg. retarded children	3	13.7
Those who have previously done PSCP	2	9.1
Aboriginals – illustrations not suited to life style	1	4.5
TOTALS	22	100.0

Twenty-two teachers were able to cite examples of families who were not catered for by the existing program. Half of these teachers considered that the language used in materials was too complex for the many parents who had a low educational standard. Language problems were also prevalent among the migrant families in two teachers' groups. Materials are not available in any language other than English. Three teachers also found that retarded children needed special individual programming as they were not suited by the program.

Another area of contention among all except two teachers was their dissatisfaction with some area of the work or working conditions. These are listed in Table 36.

Table 36: Areas of Dissatisfaction to Teachers

Areas of Dissatisfaction	Number	Percent
Lack of personal contact with families – visits and communication	15	51.8
Workload – too many children and other term commitments	4	13.8
Lack of teaching experience as 1st year out of College	1	3.4
Lack of guidelines for roles and powers of staff	6	20.7
Inept administration – lack of organization – and communication	1	3.4
Lack of amenities, water, space, equipment – cooling, facilities etc.	2	6.9
TOTALS	29	100.0

Over half of the teachers, 51.8 percent, were frustrated about the lack of personal contact possible with families. Some had wanted more visits to more families while others had been dissappointed with the lack of communication from families. It is understandable that teachers would have a more difficult task in establishing personal relationships with families who are isolated by distance than they would in a pre-school centre teaching situation.

Consequent role strain was evident in their dissatisfaction with lack of contact which thwarted the desire of teachers to be able to form a meaningful relationship with the families in their group. Several teachers, in particular those who had families who lived in the most remote areas of the State, requested that plans be made for the correspondence pre-school teacher to be based in the rural region from which her enrolments were drawn. These teachers believed that if they were based in the area and had facilities such as a mobile pre-school room, they would be able to visit their families more often and have better results through establishing a relationship with parents and children. This suggestion has an element of compelling simplicity but it's feasibility is doubtful when factors such as the distance between families, the nature of the roads and effects of flooding on planned visits by teachers are considered. The development of a more sophisticated two-way communication system between teachers and families may be a workable alternative.

The remaining causes of dissatisfaction related to the working conditions and organization. Six teachers specifically mentioned the problem of not having clear guidelines as to the powers of staff. This aspect is presently being dealt with by the pre-school branch with the formulation of an induction manual and sessions to clarify the roles of staff positions within the unit. The unsatisfactory aspects of working conditions mentioned are recognized by the unit administration and some moves to improve conditions have been commenced.

Despite these factors most teachers also mentioned areas of their work which gave them considerable satisfaction. The areas of satisfaction are presented in Table 37.

Table 37: **Areas of Satisfaction to Teachers**

Areas of Satisfaction	Number	Percent
Evidence received from parents and children that they have enjoyed and gained from Pre-School Correspondence Program	14	45.1
Personal gain from relationships with parents, children and other teachers.	8	25.8
Empathy with parents due to experience in rural life	2	6.5
Ability to attend to one family at a time	2	6.5
Reasonably happy but needs some administrative changes	5	16.1
TOTALS	31	100.0

Five teachers did not give any satisfactions and felt strongly that administrative changes were needed before they would be satisfied.

All other teachers mentioned particular satisfactions gained from some aspect of their work. Evidence was received by 14 teachers, 45.1 percent, from parents and children that they had enjoyed and gained from the pre-school correspondence program. Another eight mentioned that they had personally gained from relationships which they had formed with parents, children and other teachers.

Many said that they had gained from the knowledge that they had been able to develop the pre-school children's abilities, knowledge and joy of learning, as well as by being able to contribute to the parents.

In any system only a few years new, problems are encountered and expected to arise, but the merit is in the willingness of those responsible wanting to find out what those problems are and to work together with staff, administrative personnel and research personnel to improve the program for those pre-school children which parents will enrol in future years.

MAJOR FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of personal interviews held with all teaching staff at the pre-school correspondence unit it was found that over 60 percent of the teaching staff were under twenty-five years of age. In addition, over 80 percent of teachers have had no children of their own therefore no first-hand experience with the role of mother.

Several aspects were looked at as a result of the interviews held with parents enrolled on the program. Many parents were unsure of the abilities of their teacher. They mentioned that they considered some teachers to be too young and inexperienced, with no children of their own, and therefore unable to advise a mother on problems she was having teaching her own child (McGaw, Ashby, Grant, 1975). Quite a number of teachers, 42 percent, had no prior teaching experience to their year at the pre-school correspondence unit and a further 36.5 percent had had fewer than three and a half years experience teaching pre-school. It was found however, that 58.1 percent of teachers had resided in a rural area for some time thus adding to their understanding of the way of life of those who lived in the more isolated parts of Queensland.

Teachers who had taught for a few years have been found by advisory staff to be more favourable toward working in the area of correspondence education. These teachers as well as those who have lived in a rural environment themselves, have been found to cope with the role strain involved in teaching by correspondence far better than teachers who have come to the correspondence teaching program in their first year out of training.

Parents were judged to have a teaching role in the program by 64.5 percent of teachers but a number of teachers believed that some parents were unable to cope with their role in the program. Over all enrolments, teachers judged 106 parents, 14.2 percent, as not having been able to cope with the program. Other family and work commitments were the reasons most commonly attributed as the causes, as well as lack of parental education and the language problems encountered by migrant families. The latter was in part due to the fact that all pre-school correspondence materials are presently only available in English.

Most teachers judged parents as having an enviable position in relation to the teaching of their own children due to their knowledge of the child's abilities and interests as well as parents' ability to instruct the child at any time in the day or evening.

Aside from having this important teaching role the general view of teachers was that parents' most important functions were the interpretation of the program for their own use and the supply of feedback to teachers on children's reactions.

It was found that teachers over 25 years of age placed the emphasis on parents sharing a happy learning environment with their children, while those teachers younger than 25 years of age were more likely to concentrate on the importance of parents interpreting the program and sending teachers feedback.

Complaints were made about the administrative organization of the unit, and several aspects of the physical working conditions such as the lack of space, equipment, toilet and cooling facilities. It could not be guaranteed that effecting all the changes suggested by teachers would necessarily result in complete satisfaction.

In addition, it would not be feasible to implement all the suggested changes. Many teachers emphasized the need for more regular personal contact with children and their families by way of visits. The suggestion raised by staff that teachers be based in rural regions has serious ramifications. The expenditure that would accompany such an undertaking, with respect to the transport and accommodation costs for the teachers involved, would be excessive.

One alternative development which would also aim to improve the quantity and quality of teacher-parent-child communication entails the implementation of a sophisticated, on-line, two-way radio or telephone communication system. The feasibility of this proposal is soon to be investigated. The advent of such a system would not, however, alleviate the problem of teachers' lack or absence of face-to-face teaching experiences.

The suggestion made by teachers to the simplication of language in the program books may significantly reduce the difficulty previously experienced by migrant parents and by those who had little formal education.

Overall 83.9 percent of teachers also mentioned decided advantages of their work. The main advantage mentioned was the evidence teachers had received from parents and children that families had enjoyed and gained from their involvement in the Pre-School Correspondence Program.

It would seem advisable on the basis of the above research findings, that where possible preference should be given in the recruitment of staff in the pre-school correspondence program to pre-school teachers who have the following attributes; are over the age of 25 years, have had several years experience teaching in a pre-school centre, have had experience living in a rural area, and have had some children of their own so as to have had first-hand experience of the parental role. If teachers were to have at least some of these attributes this may reduce the role strain which has affected teachers in the past.

Other problems such as teaching dissatisfaction with the lack of role definitions and information on the authority hierarchy and the lack of concensus among teachers as to the type of information to be provided to parents may be alleviated to some extent by a more comprehensive inducation course for teachers at the beginning of the school year. This could operate in conjunction with the involvement of new staff in the operations of the program over the first six to eight weeks of the school year.

Teachers themselves had varying numbers of children in their groups depending upon their other work commitments but the most common size was 27 children. Teachers' view of their own role was most often that of a parent resource person which entailed the need to plan and supply individual materials and ideas to parents. Parents were usually the primary target of teachers communications for it was through parents that teachers judged children would be reached. Thus in effect most teachers focused on the parent-child unit. Teachers' pre-school training focused on the teacher taking a group of pre-school children in a centre and programming for each individual child. The opposite occurs when they come to teach pre-school by correspondence. They are handed a core program and expected to individualize it for the children without regular contact.

A substantial percentage of teachers considered that more information should be given to parents to clarify several aspects of the program. Namely, parents and teachers believed that more information should be available on child development and how to interpret a pre-school correspondence program. Topics which most teachers felt were presently being adequately covered included information on how to extend activities, how to make play equipment at home and the use of the home as a learning environment.

The general concensus however was that even more information should be available to send as resource material to children who voiced particular interests. Such materials were also requested by parents who considered preference should be given to illustrative material such as real life photographs (Ashby, Grant, 1977).

With respect to the quality of communication between teachers, parents and children, most teachers agreed with parents' comments on the inadequacy of the Teacher Information Sheet (McGaw, Ashby, Grant, 1975). Some radical changes to the format, type of questions and proposed use of the information has been shown to be needed. Moves have already been made within the program to reassess the usefulness and to redesign the Teacher Information Sheets.

Personal letters and tapes were found to be far superior in their usefulness to teachers. Their quality varied between parents. As a group, teachers felt that emphasis should be placed early in the year on the type of information that teachers would most like parents to send. Individual teachers were often unclear however as to what types of feedback would help them most in individualizing the program. Parents should also be informed of the use which teachers will be able to make of this information and the consequent benefits which should accrue to them. A majority of 80.7 percent of teachers decided that it was important to provide such information and said it was presently being provided.

When teachers were asked to state the goals and perceived emphasis in the program, 77.4 percent mentioned the development of the child's abilities as the goal and the emphasis as being to give parents support and information. Thus the goal was to educate the child while the associated method involved informing the parent, who would in turn, educate the child. Once again teachers are expected to form a working relationship with parents without any training in this area. An elective on early childhood correspondence education in the third year of teachers' training may improve their readiness for this different teaching role.

Only moderate success was judged by teachers as having been achieved with respect to these goals – some of the reasons mentioned were the deficiencies of the program, administration and working conditions.

Details on such areas as the content of the program, the rationale for what is included in the program, writing styles, communication patterns, and teachers functions would be useful in such an induction course. The extension and promotion of possible support services that are available to parents through teachers should also be advertised for future potential use by teachers. This and other information already commented on could be wisely included in a revised version of the handbook for pre-school correspondence teachers.

As a result of the above we have highlighted the main problem areas of effectively teaching pre-school by correspondence. The main frustrations and dissatisfactions being experienced by teachers is in relation to their lack of personal contact with the parents and children enrolled, and their lack of experiences with pre-school children and with involving parents in programming. Even experienced teachers have been unhappy with the period of absence from regular practical teaching experiences. It would seem advisable therefore if pre-school correspondence teachers could maintain a regular involvement in the programming of an on-site or neighbouring pre-school.

The above changes may reduce the amount of role strain associated with teachers' role but the task of teaching pre-school by correspondence would still remain an arduous one for teachers.

APPENDIX 1

1. **Age:** (Please indicate the appropriate age grouping by ticking the appropriate box)

Under 21 years	
22–25	
26–30	
31–35	
36 and over	

1–

2. **Number of Children in Own Family :** .....

2–

3. **Training:** (Please fill in the following information about your teacher and other training)

Name of Course	Year of Course Completion	Qualification Obtained

3–

4. **Teaching Experience:** (Please list your teaching experience since qualifying)

Name of Institution	Years	Grade Taught

4–

5. **Other Work Experience:** (Non-Teaching)

Name of Employer	Years	Type of Work

5–

6. **Residence:** Have you ever lived in a "rural" area? .....

If yes, it was between which ages?

Between the ages of ..... and 6–

7. Which "rural" area was it?..... 7–

8. Have you ever received any correspondence education? If yes, how many years of correspondence did you receive?

_____

Number of Years

_____ 8–

PARENTS' ROLE

1. Which term do you think best describes the parents' role in regard to the programme?
   (Prompt: Primary Caretaker; Liaison Officer between teacher and child; Interpretor; Teacher; Teacher's aide; Supervisor)

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____ 9-

2. How many families are in your group? _____ 10-11-

3. Do you feel parents in your group can cope with the task of taking the programme?

_____

_____

_____ 12

4. If NO, how many parents do you feel cannot cope with the task?

_____ 13

5. Can you explain why you think they cannot cope?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____ 14-

6. In which ways do you feel that a parent can cater for the needs of their own child in respect to their role in the programme?
   (Prompt: Perhaps in comparison to a person who was involved with the child in the programme but was not the parent)

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____ 15-

7. What do you see as being *the* most important function that parents perform in regard to the programme?
(Prompt. For example, it may be one of the following; transmission of the programme materials to the child; transmission of teachers' communication to the child; communications with teacher; or some other function you feel is of first importance or combination of)

TEACHERS' ROLE

1. Would you describe what you see as your role in the Pre-School Correspondence Program?
(Prompt: What do you feel you are in the programme? For example, a resource person, instructor, interpretor; programme developer; or other?)

17-

2. What do you believe are the most important functions of your role?
(Prompt: What are the main things you do that relate to your role ?)

18-19-

3. Who is the primary target for your information and efforts?
(Prompt: Parent?; Child?; Who?)

20-

PROGRAM

4. We would like to know whether you feel it is important for each of the following types of information to be provided to parents in the Pre-School Correspondence Program? In addition, please say whether you feel each type of information is presently provided or not?

Type of Information to Parents	Is Important Is Provided	Is Important Not Provided	Not Important Is Provided	Not Important Not Provided	
a. On specific aspects of child development					
b. On why a particular activity is suggested					21–
c. How to extend activities if children become particularly interested					22–
d. Ideas on how to construct home made equipment					23–
e. When requested, cognitive material in line with child's individual interest					24–
f. How to give relevant feedback to teacher on child's progress					25–
g. Interpreting a Pre-School programme structured by others					26–
h. How to utilize home environment to teach child basic skills					27–
					28–

5. How useful have you found parents' feedback on child's participation in programme activities?

Content	Useful to Great Extent	Useful to Moderate Extent	Useful to Slight Extent	Not at All Useful	
Teacher Information Sheet					29–
Comments in letter, on tape					30–

Comment: Teacher Information Sheet

31–

Comment: Letters and Tapes

32–

SUMMARY

1. What do you believe are the goals of the Pre-School Correspondence Program?

33 34–

2. To what extent do you think these goals are being achieved?

3. If No, are there any changes that could be made which you feel would enable these goals to be achieved? What are they?
(Prompt: With respect to e.g. type of communications; administration; content of programme, contact with families, etc.)

35–

4. With regard to goals, where do you see the emphasis lying?
(Prompt: Help parent become a better teacher OR Help child acquire basic cognitive skills OR Help parent become aware of home learning environment OR Help child acquire communicative skills OR Help child acquire social skills OR specific combination of above or others)

36–

5. With respect to your own group were there any families for whom you felt the programme was not suitable in its present form? Can you say why?
(Prompt: Was it in reaction to developmental level of child, OR special problem OR other?)

37–

6. Can you identify any sources of dissatisfaction related to your present position?

38–

7. Can you also identify any sources of satisfaction related to your present position?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____ 39–

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